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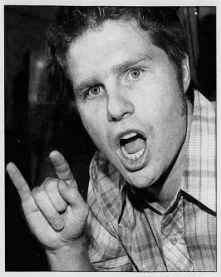
FRANCOPHONE MUSIC JUAN RODRIGUEZ

Musicians' row pulses with telling beat

NEW ALBUM

Vincent Vallières, Les Respectables celebrate rock in their own right

JUAN RODRIGUEZ
SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE



DAVE SIDAWAY GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

Vincent Vallières, who last year won Prix Félix-Leclerc for most promising singer (above), says he enjoys Mile End's "friendly scene."

It's a brilliant sunny autumn morning on St. Viateur St., at the Café Olimpico, where Vincent Vallières wears a suitably beatific smile for just "one of the guys" along Mile End's unofficial musicians' row.

Behind the quiet buzz – about last night's gig, this week's complaint, the sound of that bass player or the acoustic of a certain studio – Vallières has his own happy tale to tell. Specifically, the influences and moods behind his just-released fourth album, Le Repère tranquille (released by BYC/Select).

If Vallières gives off a mellow glow worthy of the proverbial West Coast groovy vibe, it's because he can be considered Quebec's all-American folk-rocker, firmly planted in traditions laid down by Neil Young and Bob Dylan.

"We just did a tour of Canada that wound up in Vancouver, where there's a lot of Québécois soaking up the sea," he said.

"But I haven't had a chance to really live the style of life out there. I imagine that in the songs I hear from California. And, of course, it's fascinating reading about the inner voyage of people like Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys."

Vallières considers Wilson's output from both Pet Sounds and Smile albums to be "the quintessence of American pop of the time, comparable to one of Picasso's great periods.

"Despite his personal problems, it's the music that inspires me," he said. "A lot of the music that happened in the '60s – the real arrival of rock 'n' roll – represents one of the most important turning points of the 20th century."

But, like a pale blue-and-brown, Western-checked shirt that complements his rusty complexion, his own musical style is considerably more rootsy than surf-inspired. He makes no bones about being proud to translate the day-to-day Québécois experience through the language of American folk rock, with its "solide" moorings of plangent bass, drums that offer comforting foundations and guitars that resonate as solidly as his own language. "It takes a while to shape these songs for the stage, c'est un work-in-progress," he says, explaining why he will wait until next spring to start touring Repère tranquille. The winner of the Prix Félix-Leclerc for most promising singer of 2006 does not seem in any hurry. He enjoys a happy family life (with a 14-month-old daughter) in bucolic Mile End.

"It's a friendly scene," he smiles. "I felt things change on the local scene at the very start of the 2000s. Before there were Les Colocs and Fred Fortin and Jean Leloup, that's about it. Now there's some new release worth talking about every week."

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Les Respectables were one of those groups scuffling through the lonely '90s. Indeed, they almost never made it, suffering a rupture in 1997, due to inactivity. Soon, they celebrate their 15th anniversary at a Bell Centre concert featuring Cirque du Soleil members, Mélanie Renaud and surprise special guests. So when you speak to singer Sebastien Plante, you get responses based on humility and a keen understanding of the enduring qualities of rock 'n' roll.

He says there's a trick to singing rock 'n' roll, an anglo-invented idiom, in French: "All the cool, simple, direct words are in English, and they go best with rock rhythms. The French use a lot more words to say the same thing, and it's often more poetic because of that. But it's difficult using the strengths of French – the colours and images – in rock without kind of imitating a bit of the English simplicity.

"I'm sort of bilingual," Plante says modestly, meaning he's virtually bilingual, having finished high school in London, England, (Acton High School). "Almost everything I heard growing up was in English. So when it came to doing the rock thing in French, to have total control of the lyrics in French was, for me, quite a mouthful, so to speak. You sort of wind up chesting a bit."

That includes incorporating all major rock styles (punk, reggae, ballads) in a Stones-based sound. Les Respectables may not get the kind of high-profile respect as acts like Les Cowboys Fringants or Michel Pagliaro, but look who's celebrating at Bell Centre later this month.

Les Respectables perform Sept. 22 at the Bell Centre. Tickets cost $15 to $50 via Admission, 514-790-1245 or www.admission.com.

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fasttrack

Ariane Moffatt tops ADISQ nominations

Ariane Moffatt has the greatest number of ADISQ nominations, announced yesterday in the lead up to this year's gala awards show celebrating music and performance in Quebec. Moffatt's name appears in six categories: best-selling album; pop-rock album; popular song; female singer; show by a singer-songwriter; and videoclip of the year. The group Karkwa received five nominations, including discovery of the year, and the group Kain also got five. Four nominations went to singer-songwriter Pierre Lapointe and to the group Malajube. Nominated for anglophone album of the year are Mentaks, for Mentaks; Sam Roberts, for Chemical City; Simple Plan, for MTV Hard Rock Live; the Susie Arioli Band, for Learn to Smile Again; and Nanette Workman, for Mississippi Rolling Stone. Sixty Félix awards will be given out at three galas, and Radio-Canada will broadcast the main one on Sunday, Oct. 29, beginning at 7:30 p.m. For the full list of nominees, see www.adisq.com

No charges yet for Paris Hilton

LOS ANGELES – The city attorney's office is deciding whether to file charges against Paris Hilton after her arrest last week on suspicion of drunk driving, a spokesperson said. The L.A. Police Department has submitted its case against the heiress, and the city attorney's office will review the case, the spokesperson said, and decide by the Sept. 28 arraignment date whether to prosecute. Hilton, 25, was arrested Sept. 7 in Hollywood. Police said her blood-alcohol level was 0.08 percent, which is the legal limit in California.

No space launch yet for Madonna

MOSCOW – Madonna will not be sent into space, despite a politician's proposal to book a seat for the pop star on a Russian flight to the international space station, news agencies reported yesterday. State Duma member Alexei Mitrofanov, referring to Madonna's reported desire to become a "space tourist," proposed that the lower house of parliament send a formal inquiry to the Russian space agency about organizing a space trip for her in 2008. The Duma rejected the proposal. Later, a space agency spokesperson was quoted as saying no seats on the Soyuz spacecraft would be available until 2009.

Literary awards

NEW YORK – John Updike, 74, already a Pulitzer Prize-winning author, is this year's recipient of the **Ron Award** for making a "significant contribution to the discipline of the short story as an art form." The honour, announced yesterday, comes with $30,000. The three finalists named yesterday for the **Thurber Prize for American Humor** are Kinky Friedman, author, musician, humorist and independent contender for Texas governor; Saturday Night Live writer Alan Zweibel; and Sports Illustrated humorist Bill Scheft. The winner receives $5,000 and a plaque. The **Sobol Award** is a new and lucrative literary prize with some unusual criteria – the book must be unpublished and the author must not have an agent. Just created by Sobol Literary Enterprises, a for-profit venture started by technology entrepreneur Gur Shomron, the award offers $100,000 for the best unreleased, agentless novel, with prizes of $25,000 and $10,000 for the runners-up and $1,000 each to seven others.

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CanWest Raise a Reader Lire, c'est grandir
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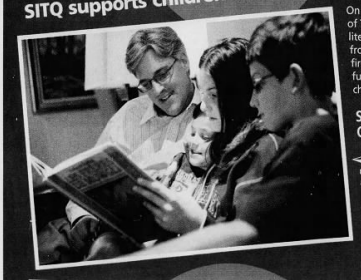
Reading inspires dreams
SITQ supports children's literacy through the Raise-a-Reader program



On Raise-a-Reader day, teams of volunteers will offer copies of The Gazette and Le Devoir in exchange for donations for literacy. Our volunteer hawkers will include representatives from our sponsors, the media, sports teams, the police and fire departments and others. One hundred per cent of the funds they collect will stay in our community to support children's and family literacy programs.

Share your love of reading.
On Sept. 28, please give generously!

Yves-André Godon, SITQ Senior Vice President Legal Affairs, reads with his children, 6-year-old Vincent, 12-year-old Marie-Laurence and 11-year-old François.

Raise-a-Reader Day
Thursday, September 28
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